

Heart Rhythm Charity backs guidance to improve patient access to lifesaving devices

Arrhythmia Alliance, 25 June 2014, UK: Arrhythmia Alliance, the only UK charity dedicated to heart rhythm disorders, welcomes the release of new National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines for the use of implantable cardioverter defibrillators (ICDs) in patients with arrhythmias in the lower chambers of the heart (ventricles) at risk of sudden cardiac arrest and/or ICDs and cardiac resynchronisation therapy (CRT) in patients living with heart failure due to a severe reduction in heart function.

CRT devices are used to treat heart failure and can be a permanent pacemaker with or without an ICD. They aim to improve the heart's pumping function but only show an improvement in symptoms of heart failure (such as breathlessness) in around 75% of people implanted with these devices. CRT-ICDs work like traditional ICDs but involve having an additional pacing lead implanted on the left side of the heart.

The new guideline expands the provision of this lifesaving therapy and recommends that more people, who previously might have only been eligible for drug therapy for the treatment and prevention of potentially life threatening arrhythmias, will now be eligible for CRT/ICD devices.



Joe Sievier, 70, is one such patient who has benefited from having a CRT/ICD device implanted. He was fitted with the device in July 2011, after suffering a sudden cardiac arrest and undergoing a quadruple heart bypass operation. He said in support of the new guideline:

“It is great to hear that more people will benefit from ICDs and CRT. I now have that added confidence, support and security that my device will act as an immediate response should I have another cardiac arrest or heart malfunction. It also gives me the opportunity to carry on with a normal daily life.

“Hopefully many more people will continue to enjoy a good quality of life now they are recommended for these devices.”

Arrhythmias, or electrical problems with the heart, affect over two million people in the UK, with those aged 40 and over having a one in four lifetime risk of developing AF (atrial fibrillation), the most common heart rhythm disorder that carries a 500% increased risk of a life-threatening stroke. Heart failure affects nearly 1 million people in the UK, a number only set to increase with an ageing population.

Trudie Lobban MBE, Arrhythmia Alliance Founder and Trustee, said:

“It is great news that more patients will be eligible for these devices. Arrhythmia Alliance will now work with NHS England and commissioning groups to make sure funds are made available and that the current gap between implant rates across the UK is tightened up.

“More patients can now benefit from devices to improve quality of life and improve chances of survival – our work will now ensure that as many of these as possible will benefit from advancements and lifesaving technology.”

Professor Richard Schilling, Consultant Cardiologist at London Barts Health NHS Trust, added:

“New guidance on CRT and ICDs will mean that more patients in England and Wales are considered for these devices; people with abnormal rhythms in the lower chambers of their heart or those with heart failure due to a severe reduction in heart function.

“Where previously these patients might have been treated with drug therapy alone they will now benefit from improved quality of life and be better protected from risks associated with life-threatening conditions.”

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Notes to editors

1) Arrhythmia Alliance, The Heart Rhythm Charity, are global advocates, working in partnership to reduce deaths and impact on individuals caused by cardiac arrhythmias and their associated morbidities. By raising awareness and campaigning for the improved detection and care of heart rhythm disorders, Arrhythmia Alliance aims to extend and improve the lives of the millions around the world that these conditions affect. Visit website www.heartrhythmcharity.org.uk

2) Arrhythmia Alliance has a number of patients across the country, who are willing to be interviewed by the media about heart rhythm disorders. We also have a number of medical professionals and heart specialists who are willing to speak on our behalf.

3) For more information, please contact Sarah Edmunds 01789 867 529 or s.edmunds@heartrhythmalliance.org.